

Melbourne can't afford new parks

September 14, 2014 - 12:15AM

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Melbourne is facing a shortage of public parks and sporting grounds, as skyscraper developers swoop on the city's best blocks and price government out of the market.

Church grounds were one of the few ways for Melbourne City Council to snap up prime land holdings in the central city, according to influential Melbourne planner Rob Adams. But now, he said even the churches are looking to develop.

The council recently embarked on an unsuccessful search to find a much-needed new park in North Melbourne.

Council's environment chairman Arron Wood said landowners either told them they were not selling, or the sale price they offered was "exorbitant".

"Yes, it's great to have economic development," Cr Wood said. "But we do not want economic development to come at the cost of liveability."

In a sign of the municipality's desperation to acquire land, councillors last week voted to support a skyscraper that would breach current overshadowing rules in exchange for a new park on the former Suncorp building site.

Concerns have also been raised about the supply of sporting grounds in the inner city and beyond. Docklands is soon to get an \$18 million park, including a football oval and children's playground. But the council has estimated that by 2031 the municipality will be facing a shortfall of 12 ovals and 12 soccer pitches, as its residential population hurtles towards 200,000 people.

Melbourne City Council collects up to 5 per cent of a development site's "unimproved" land value for its open space fund, which stands about \$11 million. In today's market that would get the council about 550 square metres, equivalent to less than 6 per cent of Federation Square.

There are growing calls for planning laws to better balance high-rise development with a requirement for new public infrastructure.

Melbourne University professor of urban planning Brendan Gleeson said in the past 10 to 20 years the state government had failed to properly plan for public infrastructure in Melbourne's inner, middle and outer suburbs.

He said Victoria needs a "metropolitan improvement fund" to oversee and fund the equitable and timely delivery of open space.

In an interview earlier this year, Professor Rob Adams pointed to a case where a new apartment project with 1300 units was only required to provide about 100 square metres of open space.

"Thirteen-hundred residential units is a small town," he said.

"If we're going to build high-density in the city, maybe developers, who are getting a considerable benefit from being able to build so much on a small site, need to give something back."

Meanwhile, the state government's new metropolitan strategy Plan Melbourne found there had been "a lack of overall direction in strategic planning for open space", including confusion over who was responsible for its delivery.

A new metropolitan open space strategy is being prepared and is likely to highlight the areas in greatest need of new parks and gardens.

The government has also announced more aggressive charges to raise funds for public space in the urban renewal precinct of Fishermans Bend, including a mandatory 8 per cent contribution of land, or equivalent value, from developers.

Savills' national head of research Tony Crabb said the going rate for CBD land was about \$20,000 per square metre. He said often governments made the mistake of not investing when land was selling cheaper, such as in 2009 when the figure was about \$10,000 per square metre.

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»The current State Government thinks so little of the beautiful Royal Park that it is prepared to butcher it for the East West Link. As the writer says developers build huge apartment block and our planning minister Guy does not force them to provide open space for the people living in them. Long term planning for the city should be taken out of the hands of the politicians with a state infrastructure planning organisation set up.«

»

Tevi | September 14, 2014, 8:15AM

“ »

»Royal Park will not be affected in the long term.«

»The East West link provides a much needed improvement to the traffic flow in that area, something the opponents of this great infrastructure don't understand. They obviously think that you can move ten tonnes of cargo on a tram...«

»

Kit Walker | St Kilda September 14, 2014, 9:17AM

“ »

»Completely agree Tevi. These developments should have compulsory open/green space ratios imposed. «

»Politicians can't plan long term, they work in 4 year cycles, moving planning decisions to an organisation that doesn't have this limitation would be a definite step in the right direction. However, my only concern with an independent planning body is how do we hold them accountable like we can a politician if they start moving in the wrong direction?«

»

Will | September 14, 2014, 9:33AM

“ »

»The East West link will not solve problems, it will create problems. It encourages more people to use more cars & generate more traffic, the Domain Tunnel has proved this to be the case. However, this is besides the point, this government & it's minister for destroying the city, Matthew Guy, will go down in history as architectural & infrastructure terrorists. In the 60's & 70's we lost so much beautiful architecture from the mid-late 19th century in the name of 'Progress'. What we have are these concrete monstrosities, an eye sore on our landscape. Unless we can get rid of this Liberal joke, Mr Guy is going to continue to destroy the Melbourne skyline. Perfect example, the unnecessary development of a 14 story tower in suburban Alphington on the old Paper Mill site. Here we have a great chance to return this area to its former glory and Mr Guy is determined to bugger it up further. If Labour is not voted in this year, Melbourne will be unrecognizable in a decade & that's not a good thing.«

»

Paul | September 14, 2014, 10:03AM

“ »

»Kit Walker«

»The East West link will be the Liberals Myki disaster! A road no-one will be able to afford.«

»

Jim | Warrandyte September 14, 2014, 10:19AM

“ »

»Motorists are the perfect revenue source and they are using up expensive government land too, without paying any rent. Sure, squeeze a bit more out of developers but that is a drop in the bucket compared to the amount that motorists need to be charged, under a realistic user-pays system.«

»

bg | September 14, 2014, 10:37AM

“ »

»Paul - did the construction of the Easter freeway force you to buy a car? No it didn't, so stop peddling the line that investment in infrastructure forces the public to purchase cars. Your argument is unproven and idiotic.«

»

Kit Walker | St Kilda September 14, 2014, 10:52AM

“ »

»Govt sell off most parks, now its a question that we need more parks but cant afford it. Simple Maths. Solution, remove both these Governments from office.«

»

Brian Woods | Glenroy September 14, 2014, 11:13AM

“ »«

»Kit Walker«

»The Eastern Freeway from Box Hill onwards will be tolled to pay for the EastWest link tunnel. So all those drivers exiting at Hoddle St will be paying for the tunnel. Thats really bad policy.«

»«

Jim | Warrandyte September 14, 2014, 11:31AM

“ »«

»The churches used to try to make society better. Didn't Jesus strongly oppose commercial activity on church land - I seem to remember an episode where he destroyed the stores of merchants outside the church.«

»«

Tetsujin | September 14, 2014, 11:49AM

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